



Office of the
Healthcare
Advocate
STATE OF CONNECTICUT

Testimony of the Office of the Healthcare Advocate
Before the Insurance and Real Estate Committee
Re SB 99
March 1, 2016

Good afternoon, Senator Crisco, Representative Megna, Senator Kelly, Representative Sampson, and members of the Insurance and Real Estate Committee. For the record, the Office Healthcare Advocate ("OHA") is an independent state agency with a three-fold mission: assuring consumers have access to medically necessary healthcare; educating consumers about their rights and responsibilities under health plans; and, informing you of problems consumers are facing in accessing care and proposing solutions to those problems.

Thank you for the opportunity to comment on SB 99, An Act Concerning Benefits Payable For Assessments To Determine A Diagnosis Of A Condition And Related Conditions. This proposal acknowledges the importance for Connecticut consumers of improving access to behavioral health providers which, as multiple stakeholders have found over the past several years, remains a challenge. SB 99 reinforces current statute which begins to correct this deficit and expanded coverage the types of providers who may be reimbursed for providing these important services.

Evaluation and diagnosis of mental or nervous conditions cannot be viewed with the same lens as standard medical conditions. While comprehensive standards exist to

guide providers, the objective measures necessary to an accurate diagnosis may be more difficult to ascertain in one or two visits with a provider. Medical conditions can be assessed with simple, tangible and concrete tests. Mental or nervous conditions may require a more subtle approach where the patient establishes a relationship with their provider and gives information with which the provider can make a diagnosis. However, this may not happen right away. SB 99 acknowledges this reality by allowing behavioral health providers to appropriately treat their patients, and receive appropriate reimbursement for those necessary services, and removing the artificial constraints of visit limitations.

These provisions serve the dual purpose of complying with state and federal parity laws and continues the work of enhancing our state's behavioral health system. Thank you very much for your foresight and dedication to this timely and critical issue.

If you have any questions concerning my testimony, please feel free to contact me at demian.fontanella@ct.gov.